

VZCZCXRO1358
PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO RUEHNAG RUEHNH
DE RUEHKO #0024 0060415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 060415Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8545
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J5//
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHMHBA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI
RHMFIUU/HQ PACAF HICKAM AFB HI//CC/PA//
RHMFIUU/USFJ //J5/JO21//
RUYNAAAC/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA
RUAYJAA/CTF 72
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2524
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UNCLAS TOKYO 000024

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DEPT FOR EAP/J, EAP/P, EAP/PD, PA;
WHITE HOUSE/NSC; SECDEF FOR JCS-J-5/JAPAN,
DASD/ISA/EAPR/JAPAN
PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR; CINCPAC
FLT/PA/ COMNAVFORJAPAN/PA.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE PRESS IN UNISON AFFIRMS BILATERAL
ALLIANCE'S IMPORTANCE

1.SUMMARY: The new year witnessed a spate of newspaper editorials and analytical articles affirming the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance and calling for resolution of the Futenma-relocation issue. Noteworthy is a rare unanimity of opinion by major newspapers on the left, in the center, and at the right of the political spectrum. END SUMMARY

¶2. Left of center: In an editorial on January 1 the Asahi affirmed that "the Japan-U.S. alliance relationship will continue to play an important role" and that the U.S. is needed to enhance political stability in Asia. While not criticizing the Hatoyama administration for delaying a decision on Futenma relocation, the daily said his government's "inept diplomacy" was partly to blame for strained U.S.-Japan relations. The editorial concluded with a call for a "grand vision for using the bilateral alliance for the benefit of Asia and the rest of the world."

¶3. Center: On January 4, the Yomiuri ran an editorial lamenting the "precarious" state of U.S.-Japan relations and describing as a most urgent task the resolution of "the issue of the relocation of U.S. Marines Corps' Futenma Air Station." On January 3 the Nikkei, Japan's influential business daily, published an editorial saying, in part: "Japan-U.S. relations are no longer "equal" or "close" owing to Hatoyama's words and deeds concerning the issue of relocating the Futenma base. The alarm bell was rung, but the Prime Minister could not hear it." The Nikkei further noted in an analytic piece published on the same day: "The Japan-U.S. discord over the Futenma issue also has the potential of tipping the military balance in East Asia. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the revision of the Japan-U.S. security treaty. China and the other Asian countries are closely watching where an 'equal Japan-U.S. relationship' is heading."

¶4. Right of center: A January 4 editorial in the Sankei, a staunch supporter of the U.S.-Japan relationship, opined that under the Hatoyama government dark clouds are beginning to gather over the bilateral alliance. Waffling on the Futenma relocation issue resulted in a decision being deferred until next year, the paper said. The editorial concluded with the warning that "there is no guarantee the turmoil over Futenma and other issues will not become the first step in the hollowing out of the alliance."

¶5. COMMENT: The seeming contradiction in the DPJ government's various ideas has given rise to concern among editorial writers, and they have felt compelled to sound a warning about possible damage to U.S.-Japan relations. The near unanimity on the security issue at newspapers across the political spectrum indicates the breadth of anxiety over the direction, or lack of direction, of Japan's security policy on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the revision of the U.S.-Japan security treaty. END COMMENT

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